

## Mission Possible: Support the Troops

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By **Steven Donald Smith / American Forces Press Service**

**WASHINGTON, Aug. 19, 2005** – Phil Randazzo is man on a mission to support American servicemembers. And he's carrying out this quest in a variety of ways.

For instance, he recently appeared on Fox News where he presented a \$20,900 check to the Wounded Warrior Project, and he has partnered with the U-Haul company to raise \$260,000 more for the group. WWP assists wounded servicemembers with their return to civilian life. "It's critical that we support these guys," Randazzo said.

Randazzo has been actively involved in supporting the troops for more than two years. Shortly after the start of the war in Iraq, he began raising money for military families and has orchestrated two pro-troop rallies in his hometown of Las Vegas. The first rally drew more than 5,000 supporters and raised \$30,000 for the United Service Organizations, he said.

Randazzo's nonprofit organization, DefendingFreedom.net, has donated more than \$216,000 to various military charities and has sent roughly 310,000 Defending Freedom camouflage wristbands to troops stationed overseas, he said.

The Defending Freedom wristbands have also been donated to military bases and military charities around the country. The charities then sell the wristbands for \$3 and keep the proceeds for their respective causes, Randazzo said.

"One hundred percent of the wristband proceeds go to military charities to support the men and women in uniform and their families. In doing this, we have made a difference in many people's lives worldwide," he said.

Randazzo was inspired to start the wristband project by the death of NFL-player-turned-Army-Ranger Pat Tillman. Tillman gave up a lucrative NFL contract to join the Rangers and was subsequently killed in Afghanistan in April 2004. "Tillman was more interested in serving his country than making a ton of money. I totally respect that," Randazzo said.

In July Randazzo visited Walter Reed Army Medical Center here, where he gave 13 mini-DVD players and 50 DVDs to the hospital so that wounded troops can enjoy movies and television programs during their recovery, he said.

"These are the people who make our country great," Randazzo said. "The greatest thing is that we got to personally deliver these items directly to the soldiers. That made it much more meaningful than mailing the items."

In addition, Randazzo made a \$10,000 donation to the Fisher House at Walter Reed where the families of wounded troops can stay while they visit their recuperating loved ones. He has sent more than 400 teddy bears to U.S. troops in Iraq, who then distribute them to Iraqi children. "They were a huge hit," he said.

In an e-mail to Randazzo, one soldier wrote that while he was handing out the stuffed animals, he "almost got trampled ... it looked like there were about 20 kids, and the next thing I knew hundreds started showing up. The kids love them and it is certainly nice to see a smile on their faces."

"I've had the opportunity to talk to several hundred of our troops on the ground in those areas and they tell me awesome stories you won't hear on any news station," Randazzo said. "Morale is still very high but they need to hear that our country is still behind them 100 percent."



Phil Randazzo talks with Fox News about his nonprofit organization, DefendingFreedom.net. Randazzo has sent more than 310,000 Defending Freedom wristbands to servicemembers overseas and has donated more than \$216,000 to various military charities. Courtesy photo



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American troops hand out teddy bears to Iraqi children. Phil Randazzo's nonprofit organization DefendingFreedom.net has sent more than 400 Teddy bears to U.S. troops in Iraq who then distribute them to Iraqi children. Courtesy photo [Download high res image](#)